



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

August 4, 2024

Pastor Philip Merten

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [2 Kings 6:8–17](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46 CW

Second Lesson: [2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18](#)

Gospel Lesson/ Sermon Text: [Mark 6:45–56](#)

### **Meaningful Ministry: Fear Not, for the Lord Is with You** **YOU MEET JESUS IN SOME OF THE STRANGEST PLACES**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

*Almighty God Holy Spirit, keep working in us. Keep bringing us out of darkness. Keep bringing us out of fear, out of shame, out of resentment and judgment, and keep on bringing us into God's wonderful kingdom of grace; in Jesus' name, Amen.*

When you read through the Gospels and you see Jesus' disciples constantly putting their feet in their mouths and constantly acting like they just didn't get it, it's easy to throw stones at them. It's easy to laugh at them and say "Look at these dummies," but actually, I think all of us, if we are honest with ourselves, we can relate to them. I know I can.

I'm looking at this episode here and it takes me back to when I first started doing ministry in corrections facilities. This would be all the way back to 1990 when I first went into Milwaukee County Jail. I really didn't know what to expect going in there. I had a lot of anxiety and trepidation. I kept thinking, "What can I say to these guys? What is there that I can relate to? How do we connect?" I wasn't sure how this was ever going to happen.

My first stop was at the nurses' station there at the jail. They steered me toward a guy or two that they thought really would like to talk to a chaplain. So I went and talked to these guys and they were really happy to see me. They were really glad to talk. We had a lot to talk about. We talked for quite a while. When I was done talking to each of them, there would always be someone else down the line who would say "Hey, when you're done with him, can you come and talk to me? I have some things that we need to discuss." That kind of snowballed.

There I was, thinking that I don't know what I'm going to do and how am I going to bring Jesus to these guys, and the truth was, Jesus was already there. He got there ahead of me. In [Matthew 25](#) where Jesus says, **"...I was in prison and you came to visit me..."**, "I found out over the years that He means that. Whenever I go behind razor wire, Jesus is already there. He is saying, "Hey Phil, I'm glad you're here. Come and meet my guys." He got there ahead of me. He has been at work, and I just get to join Him in His work. A prison/jail, it's a strange place, but I go and meet Jesus there. It happens all the time. I think it's the kind of thing that we can relate to the disciples about.

This is where I'm coming from with it. Like you, probably, I trust Jesus as my Savior. I trust that He's going to bring me everlasting life. I trust that He has forgiven me. I trust that when He said, **"...I am with you always..."** ([Matthew 28:20](#)) He means it. He keeps His promises. And there we are, with that belief, with that faith, and we run into some new/unfamiliar situation and we get scared that we're all alone. The disciples did it. We did it. We could save ourselves a whole lot of anxiety, just like those disciples could have, if we believed Jesus when He says He's with us always. What we need to do, I believe, is learn to listen to the Holy Spirit as He directs us every time we get into some situation where it's strange, it's scary, it's new, and it's weird, to look around for Jesus. He is going to show up. In fact, He's already there. Look for Him. Join Him.

These disciples were in this boat, experienced men on the water who made their living as fishermen on that very lake, but this was a situation that really unnerved them. It was because of that headwind they were up against. I know what that is like, at least a little bit, from some of my experiences; being in a rowboat or a canoe out on some big water and the wind is pushing against you. That can really be unnerving. Maybe you've had that situation. You feel so tiny, just me and my paddle up against all that wind. It's scary.

The disciples were scared and you can understand. But at the same time, it had been just a few hours before that these same men had been with Jesus when all those people, those thousands of people, showed up and they were going "What are we going to feed these guys?" and Jesus said "What do you have?" "A couple of sardine sandwiches," and He said, "That will do." With that, He fed thousands and thousands and thousands of people. They had just seen that kind of power. ([See Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17.](#))

According to Matthew, they had seen Jesus show His power in the middle of the lake, that same lake, in the same sort of situation; heavy winds that were against them and they couldn't get to the land. They had seen Jesus on the water. This time, He was still on land and they were out in the middle and Mark says that their hearts were hard. They didn't understand and they were shocked when Jesus showed up. In fact, they weren't expecting Him to show up when they could have. ([See Matthew 14:22-36, Mark 6:44-56.](#))

When Jesus decided to come strolling along on the water, literally it says that He had intended to keep going. It was like they could have just seen Him and said, "Oh look, there is somebody standing on the water. It's Jesus, of course. Hi Jesus," and just a wave and maybe a "How are you doing, guys?" and He could have kept going and they could have said, "He'll meet us there. We're good." But that's not what happened. They saw a human figure on the water and instead of the most obvious connection, "Well, it's got to be Jesus," they let their fear and their anxiety and all the ghost stories they heard growing up, they let that talk to them instead and they drew the conclusion, "A human figure out on the lake? It's got to be a ghost!" And they got all scared. It didn't have to happen.

They needed to understand what we all need to understand. No matter where you are, if it's scary, if it's frustrating, if it's anything that you feel like you can't handle, Jesus is there. Look for Him and join Him where He is at. He will show up. He always shows up.

I thought of a situation. It wasn't where I was terrified. It was where I was frustrated and bored and resentful. I was not expecting Jesus to be there. I hate to admit this but it was at a pastors' conference. The pastors' conference was scheduled. I had a lot of other things I could have been doing but no, be the dutiful guy and go to the pastors' conference. I looked at the agenda and thought "Oh man, look at these topics. There is nothing that is meaningful here. There is nothing here that is relevant and now I have to sit and listen to all these esoteric points of theology and hear guys argue about them; great; wonderful." I was just grouching to myself and somehow God got through to me and said, to the effect, "Well, never mind those papers, never mind the boring discussion. Look around. There are people that you can interact with, people that you need to listen to, maybe people that you need to talk with. And that's what I did that day. For once, instead of feeling sorry for myself because I was bored, because of the conference, I looked around at the people and had a lot of great conversations with people. I learned stuff. They learned stuff. We made some great connections. Jesus showed up. In the middle of this conference, when I thought this was going to be nothing but boring, great things happened because Jesus showed up. Jesus always shows up.

Think about it; the things that keep us from recognizing Jesus' presence. In the disciples' case, it was their anxiety, their fears, stories they heard from when they were kids. They let those talk to them instead of letting the Holy Spirit talk to them and say "Look to Jesus." We have to think, "What are the things that get in my way? What are the things that keep me from looking around for Jesus? What fears do I have? Is it my guilt? Is it my feeling like I'm not good enough for God? God is not going to be with me because I haven't measured up?" It's anything that we have that is keeping us from looking around and seeing where Jesus is going to show up. Here is our Savior saying, "You can drop those. You can forget all those because I will show up. Watch for me." So let's do that.

Watch for Jesus to show up. Expect Him to show up. And keep our eyes open to the ways that He shows up and the people that He shows up through. The disciples weren't expecting Jesus to show up in person, just walking on water. Sometimes we don't expect Him to show up. We're not looking for Him because He chooses people to work through that we weren't expecting Him to work through.

At one of the prisons that I do a Bible study with every week down in Sturtevant, I was driving home from there with my friend, Terry. Terry speaks Spanish. He took the Spanish-speaking guys. I took the English-speaking guys that night. As we were driving home, Terry told me about a situation that he had in his group. One of the guys came to his Bible study completely shook up because he had gotten some of the worst news a guy can get. His little girl had been in the line of a stray bullet. She caught this bullet and she died. He had gotten that news and there he was, coming to this Bible study, and here was Terry saying "What do I do with this?" As Terry was telling me this, I thought about how I react when I get into these situations. Usually it's panic. I'm thinking "What can I say? What can I do? Uhhhh, I'm the 'God guy,' I have to somehow bring some meaning/something to this situation for this guy who is just having the worst day of his life." What do you say?

Terry told me that he didn't have a chance to panic like that because all the other guys, all the other inmates in this group immediately said "Tenemos que orar por nuestro hermano," which means "We have to pray for our brother." He said those guys just surrounded him. He was just completely surrounded by people caring for him, praying for him, showering love on him and who knows what they were saying when they were praying. I'm sure Terry could tell us because he can speak Spanish. But I'm not sure if that man understood, if he could even hear through his grief, but he could tell he was being loved. That's what gets through.

Think about that—when people are having the worst days of their lives, what are they going to hear? We want to be ready. We want to know the truth about God, the truth of the Gospel. We want to be able to speak that clearly to people who need clarity. And we also have to understand that there are some limitations to language. When a person is having the worst day of their lives—think of the times when you've been in those situations. Someone is talking to you and you are just kind of in a fog, aren't you? Stuff doesn't get through. At least words don't get through. But love does. Love gets through. That's what people need when they are in a crisis. Sure, they need the truth, but above all, they need love. They need somebody to stand there and love them, like those guys did in prison for their friend who was grieving so badly. And the Bible says **God is love.** <sup>(1 John 4:8)</sup> If we show up for people, God is showing up. If there is love there, God is there. Jesus shows up. He'll show up for us when we are having the worst day in

our lives, in love, and we can make that happen for other people, too. You've probably seen that. You've probably had somebody show up and love you at a time when you needed it. I know I have, many times.

I think one of my worst days was back when my father was in hospice. He was dying. I had spent the night with him. I didn't want him to be alone. A nurse woke me up early in the morning and said "Your father's breathing is changing. It won't be long now. You better call the rest of your family and see if they can get here in time." I did but I knew they weren't going to make it in time, so it was just me and my father. I was standing there with him as he was taking his final breaths. About that time, a little nurse's aide walked in. I remember she was maybe five-foot nothing. She walked in. I don't remember what she said; probably just "Good morning" or something. She sized up the situation, looked at me, and the way I remember it was she came charging into the room, grabbed me, wrapped her arms around me, and that was what I needed at that moment. I had been holding it together up until that time, but boy, when she gave me a hug, it was just waterworks time. Boy, did I need that! She was there to love me. Jesus shows up on the worst days of our lives. He showed up on that day for me. He showed up in the form of a five-foot nothing nurse's aide named, Bernice. That was what I needed. I needed love. Jesus showed up. He showed up to love me.

That's where we can all be with Jesus. He wants to be there for people when they are having the worst day of their lives. We can be part of that. We can be there to love people. And we can look around for the people who are going to love us when we are having those terrible, terrible days because Jesus does show up. He always will. He promised He will. And Jesus keeps His promises. When you are in a strange, scary place, look around for Jesus. Look around for what He is going to do for you. Look around for how you can join Him.

Let's pray about that.

*Lord God, you are with us. You are with us always to the very end of the age. You are with us to love us, to lift us up, to strengthen us, to empower us. Help us to believe that, Lord. Help us to expect it. Help us to find ways that we can work right along with you. Help us to look around for broken-hearted, scared people and join you as you love them. We are praying for all this in Jesus' name. Amen.*